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ABSTRACT

This study provides empirical data about the role and work context of the principal in public and private secondary schools in Lebanon. The study focused on questionnaires, interviews, and observations of 33 principals in Lebanon. The researchers wished to examine the principals' perspectives on their roles, responsibilities and the way the role is shaped by various contextual factors in public and private schools located in urban, small town, and rural communities in North Lebanon. The study offers comparisons of the principalship across cultural contexts, including comparisons with the United States and Canada, as well as neighboring countries. The research recommends further studies to enhance awareness of similarities and differences among the role of principals across cultures and educational settings. (EH)

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Leadership and Work Context of Public and Private Secondary Schools

in the Republic of Lebanon

A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association San Diego, California April 13-17, 1998

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Introduction

In 1989, and after 15 years of Civil War, representatives of all the Lebanese war factions signed the Ta'if accord to stop the fighting. Following this important event, the Lebanese government focused its efforts on rebuilding a country badly damaged by a destructive war (Bashshur, 1992).

Among many others, the educational sector was the target of reform. One of the latest government attempts at salvaging the system is the 1993 plan prepared by the National Educational Center for Research and Development (National Educational Center), a branch of the Ministry of National Education and Fine Arts. Reforming school administration was part of this plan. Recommendations for improvement called for decreasing centralization within the Ministry of Education and for improving the work conditions of school principals through widening the scope of their decision-making authority and providing them with professional in-service and pre-service training. However, the formulation and the intended implementation of the reform plan were never based on empirical studies that reflect the current state of the art or the perspectives of the practitioners. Principals hold a position that is key to the functioning of their schools, and attempts for improvement through reform policies cannot exclude occupants of this position if they are to succeed.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to provide empirical data about the role and work context of the principal in public and private secondary schools in Lebanon. The study focused on these principals' perspectives on their role responsibilities and the way the role is shaped by various contextual factors in public and private schools located in urban, small town ,and rural communities in North Lebanon. A two-fold secondary purpose of the study was (a) to examine the usefulness of organizational and leadership theories and concepts

developed in the West to studying and understanding the principalship and the challenges of school leadership and administration in the Lebanese cultural context, and (b) to discern similarities and differences in the role and work context of Lebanese secondary principals and their counterparts in North America and in other countries in the Middle East.

Theoretical Framework

Conducting empirical research is a practice that is not common in the Lebanese context. Empirical literature on the Lebanese principalship is almost non-existent. As a result, this study relied extensively on Western concepts to frame the problem, as well as to assist in the design of data collection and analysis procedures.

A theoretical framework rooted in several sociological theories, including symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), social systems theory (Getzels and Guba, 1957; Getzels, Lipham, and Campbell, 1968), and role theory as developed by Gross, Mason and McEarchern (1958) and by Katz and Kahn (1978), guided the study. However, the cultural dependency of these Western theories limits their "portability" to the Lebanese context and restricts their usefulness for understanding the school principalship in Lebanon (Hallinger, 1995). Consequently, while the study was not based on any one of these theories, it did use them as potentially useful guides to inquiry and analysis.

Symbolic interactionism provides this study with the assumptions to comprehend the merits of exposing an individual's perspective as a means to understand their action. The symbolic interactionist views the human being as possessing a self (Blumer, 1969). Human beings can become objects to themselves; they may perceive themselves, have conceptions of themselves, and act toward themselves. On that account, the possession of a self provides human beings with a mechanism of self-interaction with which to meet the world, one that is substantial in forming and guiding their social conduct.

Furthermore, symbolic interactionism challenges what Blumer (1969) called "the structural conception of human society" (p. 74). Symbolic interactionism does not view human society as an established structure, but as composed of the actions of people as they act upon the situations they are exposed to in their lives. Social action is not seen as the result of societal factors but as a construction made by human actors as they define and interpret their situations. Accordingly, group life is not perceived as "the expression of established structure but as a process of building up joint action" (p. 75).

The Getzels-Guba (1957) social systems model and role theory as developed by Gross, Mason and McEarchern (1958) and by Katz and Kahn (1978), provided the study with the conceptual language to formulate its research questions. In line with the social systems model the school is conceived of as a social system consisting of two major dimensions: (a) the institutional dimension that gives rise to certain roles and expectations to achieve the goals of the system, (b) and the individual dimension with certain personalities and

need-dispositions inhabiting the system (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Getzels et al., 1968). Further, the school is conceived as a social system embedded in a broader cultural environment. The study mainly focused on the institutional dimension of the school system and its impact on the principal's role.

Two role concepts advanced by Gross et al. (1958) were relevant to this study: position, and expectations. Position is used to refer to "location of an actor or class of actors in a system of social relationship" (Gross et al., 1958, p. 48). Analysis of a particular position requires two kinds of specifications: the relational and the situational. First, the relational specification consists of locating the other positions in the social system that are related to the focal position of the analysis. The second specification that is required concerns the situational context in which the position is to be examined. Situational specifications require the determination of the scope of the social system in which the position is located.

Expectations are defined as "an evaluative standard applied to an incumbent of a position" (Gross et al., 1958, p. 58). Expectations constitute a normative dimension; they help specify what should happen in a certain situation. Role expectations are not restricted to the job description as presented by the official rules of the organization. Rather, they include all kinds of influences regarding the preferences of specific acts--things the person should do or avoid doing, as well as personal characteristics or style, and ideas about what the person should be, should think, or should believe (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Katz and Kahn (1978) provided two additional concepts for role analysis; sent role and received role. The two concepts help describe the process by which expectations of a certain role incumbent are communicated. According to Katz and Kahn, the process of role sending consists of communications stemming from role expectations and sent by others to inform and influence the role occupant. The received role determines how the person acts. The process of communicating expectations is not exclusive to situations where different members of the social system are involved. Each role occupant can act as his or her own "role-sender."

This study analyzes the role of the school principal in terms of the sent and received role. However, it mainly focuses on the reflexive role expectations that school principals send to themselves, since these will shape the perceptions of their role and will ultimately have the strongest impact on their actions. The study also investigated the situational and relational aspects of the principalship position and the organizational conditions that determine the formal job responsibilities of the school principal.

Study Design

This study was designed in accordance with the procedural guidelines of the grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994). The study's procedures followed three basic operations: (a) participants were selected on the basis

of their relevance to the emerging categories, (b) data collection was continuously seeking relevant data that theoretically enriched the emerging categories, © the data were systematically coded and analyzed -- identifying categories, properties of categories, and relationships among categories.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data were collected during eight weeks of field work in Lebanon. Open-ended depth interviews (Merton, et al, 1990) with 33 principals were designed to reveal the participants' subjective experience of the principalship (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). A demographic questionnaire written in Arabic also was administered to all (88) secondary principals in the district, yielding 84 usable surveys. Other sources of data used to complement the interviews included: document analysis of the laws and organizational rules and school policies shaping the role of the principal; a focus group interview (Merton et al., 1990, Morgan 1995) with a group of eight private and public school principals during the eighth week of the field work; and field notes that recorded the researcher's observations and reflections.

The schools visited included public and private, urban, town, and rural schools with enrollments varying between 25 and 3,570, with an average size of 850 students. Of the schools visited, 55% were private, 42% were located in the urban center, with 40% in rural areas. In addition, private schools owned by Catholic organizations constituted 35% of all schools visited; 18% were owned by Greek orthodox groups; 29% by Muslim groups or individuals 29%, and 18% by secular groups or individuals.

The principals selected as participants accounted for one-third of the total number of secondary school principals in the district. The oldest participant was 67, the youngest 36, and the average age was 51 years. Of those, 36% were women, and 15% had doctorates. The number of years the principals spent in their position ranged between 1 and 34, with an average of 15 years.

All interviews were conducted in Arabic, and then translated into English and transcribed after returning to the U.S. Most interviews, including the focus group interview, were tape-recorded. The field researcher herself was a Lebanese. Similarly, the group interviews, the field notes, and the research journal were also translated and transcribed.

The transcribed field data were entered as a data base to be analyzed with the assistance of the NUD.IST program for qualitative data analysis (QSRNUD.IST, 1995). Data collected through the survey questionnaire were analyzed with the help of the SPSS (1993) program for statistical analysis.

Results

The results include: (a) a demographic profile of the secondary school principals; (b) a description of the principal selection process and principals' ways of learning about their responsibilities; © role responsibilities of Lebanese principals as perceived by principals in public and private secondary schools; and (d) an overview of the organizational work context and the factors shaping the role demands on principals in public and private secondary schools.

General Views of the Principalship

The Lebanese secondary school principal viewed their role as being the main person responsible for the school functioning with all its daily details. He/she is in charge of managing the school staff as a team and of assigning responsibilities to them. In addition, the principalship appears to have a normative dimension. The principal views his/her role as a moral responsibility in service of the community as a whole. Principals are the "role model," assuming the "father and/or the mother" figure in their schools. These terms were used by the principals themselves to describe their role.

The principalship in Lebanon is an evolving role; one that cannot be strictly predetermined by policies, but rather is shaped in response to the prevailing conditions as they present themselves. The principalship is also viewed as the culmination of a successful teaching career. Being a good principal is tightly linked by principals themselves to having a successful teaching career. Finally, principals perceived their role as complex, demanding more time than what is officially allocated.

Demographic Profile of the Principals

Secondary school principals are on the average 50 years old, with the youngest being 26 and the oldest 81 years of age. Female principals constitute 30% of all the principals Almost all secondary principals--95% of the total--had teaching experience prior to their appointment to the principalship. Moreover, 44% of the principals continued to teach after becoming principals.

All principals hold a college degree, and 26% of them have also completed teacher preparation programs. Of all the principals, 41% have graduate degrees (master's), but only 15% have finished their doctorate studies. Only 12% indicated that their undergraduate major was education. However, education was the field of choice for graduate studies. Half of the principals (52%) with graduate degrees specialized in education.

Regarding administrative experience, responses show that most principals have been on the job for a long time. Only 19% of all principals reported an administrative experience of fewer than 5 years. The length of experience is, in part, because of the low turnover among

principals. Once appointed to their position, principals rarely change schools. Of all principals, only 26% had worked in more than one school. The survey data also show that in almost all cases (97%), the principal's religion matches that of the school. In fact, the interviews suggest that principals are selected to have the same religious affiliation as either the owner of the school, in the case of private schools, or of the community where the school is located, in the case of public schools.

Finally, the data reveal that half (51%) of the principals have never received any kind of administrative training. Of all principals, only 24% were trained prior to their appointment to the position. The training that the principals reported was limited to brief workshops ranging between a few weeks and a few months. These training sessions were organized with no consistency regarding their timing or the context.

Principal Selection

The Lebanese government provides guidelines to follow in the selection of principals. These guidelines are used in selecting both public and private school principals. For public secondary schools, the selection process starts with a recommendation by the Director of Secondary Education to the Director General of Education. Based upon the approval of the Director of General Education, the recommendation is signed by the Minister of Education (Decree No. 590, 1974). In addition, in public schools, it must be determined that the candidate has been a tenured secondary school teacher for at least five years (Decree No. 590, 1974). In private secondary schools, the owners/operators of the school are in control of the selection process. However, the candidates still must meet certain government criteria. The candidates are required to have (a) a university degree with a specialty in education or educational administration or (b) a university degree in a field other than education and at least three years of teaching experience (Decree No. 2896, 1992).

In addition to governmental guidelines and local administrative criteria, other criteria in selecting principals emerged from the interview data. These criteria are: (a) support from political leaders, (b) compatibility of religion between the school and the principal, and © personal connections. Personal connections often were mediated by community religious leaders and other influentials.

Learning the Role

Once in the position, Lebanese principals are left on their own to learn their responsibilities and to formulate their own conceptions about the job. In both public and private schools, official school policies provide minimal assistance about the principal's responsibilities. In addition, both pre-service and in-service administrative training are basically unavailable for the vast majority of the principals. Fifty percent of the interviewed principals noted that their primary learning about the role of the principal occurred while "on-the-job." Principals also noted that with time and practice they gradually formulated the

views they now hold about the nature of their work. Several mentioned "finding their way through experience" and "learning new things every time there was need for that."

Formal Role Expectations

Examination of the formal lists of responsibilities for public and private school principals reveals similarities as well as differences in the role's demands. Principals in private and public schools are expected to be the main person responsible for supervising all aspects of the school's functioning. For both types of school, the principal is required to be in charge of planning the school year by setting the teachers' schedules, deciding about the school tests and exams, evaluating the textbooks to be used, and assessing the school needs in staffing and educational supplies. In addition, principals of public and private schools both are expected to report to their supervisors about the financial and educational aspects of their schools.

However, private school principals appear to have additional responsibilities. First, unlike the case in public schools, principals in private schools are actively involved in recruiting and appointing their teachers. Second, private school principals are required to be in charge of handling the students' discipline and academic problems. Third, the formal job description of the private school principal includes facilitating and encouraging the school-parent relationship, a responsibility that the formal job description of the public school principal does not include.

Actual Role Behavior

From the principals' perspectives, the work day of the principal is a composite of a multitude of activities touching all facets of the school's functioning. The principals' activities cover the following general areas: dealing with their supervisors, dealing with teachers, dealing with students, dealing with parents and community, implementing rules and policies, managing the administrative functions, planning and organizing classroom instruction, and acting as the agent for change. The emphasis the principals give to each of these activities, as well as the manner in which principals carry out these activities, differ from principal to principal and from school to school depending on the school type and location.

The principal's position is the focal link between the school and the governance body in charge of setting school policy--the central office in the case of public schools and the school owner(s) in the case of private schools. With varying degrees of autonomy and participation, policy implementation is a major part of the principal's responsibilities in both public and private schools. Principals viewed themselves in charge of implementing and communicating policies and directives. Principals conducted regular meetings to communicate school goals to teachers and to plan the implementation of directives the principals received from their supervisors. In addition, for many principals, especially those in public schools, implementing policies also included evaluating critically their relevance and coming up with creative interpretations that serve the best interest of the school.

Supervising the school staff constituted another major part of the perceived role responsibilities of the principal. Principals related that one of their main goals is to provide a good working atmosphere for the teachers and the other school staff. Principals organize the work of teachers by planning the teachers' schedules, assigning coordination responsibilities to selected teachers, and presiding at curriculum planning meetings to ensure adherence to the officially mandated curriculum. Moreover, principals viewed themselves in charge of evaluating the work of the teachers by ensuring their adherence to their assigned teaching schedules, checking their preparation booklets to make sure they follow the assigned curriculum, and checking students' grades on exams as an indicator of whether a teacher is performing well or not. Principals also believe that they need to stay in close contact with their teachers, and that they need to establish a family-like atmosphere of caring and support. In many instances, principals were not only responding to the teachers' professional problems, but assisted in resolving their personal problems as well.

Managing students' academic and discipline problems is another area of the school operation that the principals considered part of their responsibilities. Most of the principals interviewed stated that they adopt an open door policy to be accessible to students; they listen to the students' complaints about their teachers, and on a few occasions help resolve personal problems that are affecting their academic performance. The principals also related that they are responsible for setting the school discipline rules and reinforcing them, and for establishing a student-friendly vision for the school, mainly through dealing with the students compassionately and securing high academic standards to ensure that students perform well on the official exams.

Managing school-parent relations is yet another area of responsibility identified by the interviewed principals. Though dealing with the parents and the community is not officially part of the principal's responsibility, all of the principals interviewed cited dealing with the parents and the school community as an important aspect of their job. To various degrees, principals in both public and private schools act as the mediator between the school and the parents while managing the school-parent relationship. Principals noted that they try to be responsive to parents' concerns about finances and academic standards as well as work hard to encourage the uninvolved parents to come to the school and contribute in some way. In addition, principals became actively involved in handling problematic situations with the parents, as in the case of an underachieving or misbehaving student.

Managing routine administrative functions of the school was part of the principal's responsibilities. These included getting involved in raising funds for the school, managing routine paperwork, and the documentation of financial transactions as well as reporting regularly to supervisors about the school's finances, academic standing, and needs for equipment and maintenance. Principals also assumed a number of responsibilities directly related to instruction. These include: planning and organizing the curriculum, determining the teachers' schedules, setting school goals, and visiting the classroom.

Finally, regardless of the type or location of the school, principals' viewed themselves as catalysts for change, despite limited resources. Principals in both public and private schools presented themselves as the main source of new ideas for improving instruction, organization, and facilities within their schools. Although public school principals cited many examples of improvements, it is apparent from the description of these improvements that, in many cases, principals were merely restoring their schools after the long Civil War period of neglect. Improvements reported and observed tended to focus on the physical conditions of the school itself, and on the adequacy of basic classroom equipment and instructional materials. While there is a strong concern by the principal that the school succeed in teaching its students (determined primarily by the number of students able to pass the official exams), changes and improvements tended not to focus directly on the effectiveness of teaching and learning, the instructional program, or the school's curriculum.

Contextual Influences on the Principalship

Many factors shape the work context of the Lebanese school principal. These include the organizational structure of the school, the location of the school, and the prevailing socio-political conditions in the school community.

The organizational structure of the school is a major factor that affects the principal's work. Major variations in the organizational structure are associated with differences in the school type and ownership. In private schools, the governance structure varies from one school to the other. Yet, in general, this structure gives the principal some autonomy in making decisions related to the daily operation of their schools. Moreover, principals in private schools (in contrast to those in public schools) enjoy geographic proximity with their supervisors. This structural condition facilitates interaction and enhances the principals' chances to provide input to the policy decisions made by the school's owner or the owner organization. Consequently, private school principals viewed policies as general guidelines that never restrict or interfere in their work, and were actively involved in setting the internal organizational structure of their schools.

In public schools, however, principals work under a highly centralized bureaucracy. In public schools, the immediate superior of the secondary school principal is the Director of Secondary Education (Decree No. 590, 1974). The latter operates from the headquarters of the Ministry of Education, centralized in the country's capital in Beirut. The Director of Secondary Education makes the main decisions for secondary schools based on the educational policy approved by the Director General of Education and the Minister of Education. The decisions made by the Director of Secondary Education are communicated to all the secondary principals in the different educational districts through an internal correspondence system. On rare occasions, the principals are required to go personally to the central office to meet with their supervisors (Decree No. 590, 1974). In addition to receiving orders from the Director of Secondary Education, public school principals are supervised by an inspectorate body that is under the jurisdiction of the country's prime minister.

Educational, administrative and financial inspectors visit the schools to examine the performance of the public school to ensure their adherence to the laws and regulations in effect in the schools (Decree No. 2460, 1959). As a result, principals' decision making power is very limited. In public schools, the central office assigns the teachers, evaluates their work and makes decisions about reprimanding incompetence. Under these conditions, the principals face difficulties holding the teachers accountable to maintain a high quality of performance within the classroom. The central office also sends equipment and mandates regulations without any consideration of the individual needs of the schools.

School location appears to be another contextual factor that influenced the principals' work in both public and private schools. This influence is apparent in school resources and relations with the community. Principals of both public and private schools in rural areas have to deal with more resource shortages than do their counterparts in urban areas. In many instances, public school principals do not have their own school buildings, cannot have the teaching staff they request, and rarely get funding from the central office that responds to their needs. Public school principals in remote rural areas explained that because of these shortages, they find themselves consumed with daily problems that are far from what they would like to do as principals; for example, fixing broken windows, rearranging their office to serve as a classroom, substituting for absent teachers, and handling all the secretarial work within the school.

Private school principals are also affected by resource limitations, although in a slightly different manner. Private schools are better equipped and staffed than their public counterparts in rural areas. However, parents in many cases are too poor to pay the tuition fees--the main source of funding for the school. Consequently, fund raising becomes a major part of the principal's work. Principals in private schools are actively involved in finding scholarships to support their needy students, and to subsidize the school budget.

The location of the school also places additional demands on the principals' time. Principals in urban schools rarely become as involved in the community as principals in town and rural settings do. In rural areas, principals participate in social occasions like weddings and funerals. In most cases, they know the families of their students personally and exchange social visits with them. Consequently, principals in rural areas get actively involved in the life of their students, and spend a major part of their time making themselves available to their students and their parents. In rural areas, parents often depend on the principals for advice and seek their help to resolve some of their child's personal problems. In contrast, urban school principals are less involved in their communities. Their relations with parents are limited to interactions within the school. Principals in urban schools have fixed schedules to meet with the parents, and limit getting involved in personal details of their students' lives to severely problematic cases.

Political Dimensions of the Principalship

Politics appear as a major factor shaping the work and work context of the Lebanese school principal. In fact, the Lebanese educational system might best be described as a "politicized bureaucracy." The organizational structure of the system follows the characteristics of a centralized bureaucracy, yet closer examination shows that the actual functioning of this system is strongly influenced by local politics grounded in religion and in family.

Religious leaders and other community influentials exert strong and regular pressure on school leaders in the public and private sector, and on senior administrators in the highly centralized educational bureaucracy. In this sense, political influence is institutionalized in the system. It is the accepted way of doing things. Political and religious favoritism determines, to a great degree, the teachers who get hired, the students who are admitted, and the amount of resources a school receives. Community religious leaders and other politicians also interfere in many decisions that are related to the daily functioning of the school, like promoting students, enforcing discipline rules, and reprimanding incompetent teachers. Consequently, a principal's ability to make educationally appropriate decisions within the school becomes highly constrained; professional administrative discretion is limited. In most cases, principals devote considerable time and effort to managing the demands placed on them by local politicians: responding to and negotiating these demands, and attempting to minimize potentially negative effects on the school's functioning. The impact of politics in the work context of the principal exists in both public and private schools, and occurs in different ways and to different degrees in each type of school.

In the public sector, politics affects school administration at all levels. At the central office, the main governance body of public schools, politicians' preferences and views influence, to a large degree, all major decision-making processes and outcomes. Religious leaders and other community politicians are actively involved in shaping decisions related to appointing new principals and teachers, the opening of new schools, and allocation of resources among the schools. As the principals reported, because many policies were formulated in response to political considerations they often result in irrelevant decisions that complicate rather than facilitate the work of the principal.

The influence of politicians on educational decision making in public schools is propagated through an institutionalized process of favoritism in hiring. Community political and religious leaders compete fiercely to ensure that their followers hold as many key leadership positions (at all levels) as possible. Politicians' influence is also maintained by the fact that Lebanese educators, as individuals, tend to have more loyalty to their personal religious and political affiliations when making decisions than to their professional judgment and views as educators. Politicians try to get their followers into as many educational leadership positions as they can. By getting them hired to key positions, political and religious leaders appeal to the expectations of their followers and thus reenforce and

perpetuate their influence in the school system (and within their respective political and religious communities).

The principalship is one of the leadership positions for which politicians compete. As the study revealed, political affiliation is a strong determinant of who gets selected to become a public school principal. Local political and religious leaders push to ensure that one of their followers is selected. Once appointed, the principal that they supported is expected to allow that religious or community leader to have a say in every issue in the school. Politicians demand personal favors from the principals, which in many cases consist of breaking the school's formal policies. For example, because political and religious leaders want to please parents in their community and win their support, they might ask principals to promote students who have received a failing grade. Another example includes trying to stop the principal from reporting to the central office the poor performance of a teacher considered to be an ally or follower of the political or religious leader (thus helping that teacher maintain his or her job despite inadequate teaching performance).

Interestingly, political and religious leaders still are able to exert pressure on public school principals in their communities even if they were not directly involved in supporting the hiring of that principal. As a result, most public school principals find themselves forced to choose between two evils: pledge loyalty to a certain political leader to get support when asking for resources (at the risk of allowing this politician unconditional interference in the school); or avoid being associated with politicians (at the risk of leaving the school to suffer from a lack of resources and funding because their expressed needs for assistance are not politically supported, and thus likely be ignored by supervisors at the central office).

Although the most extreme examples of political interferences take place in public schools, political influence occurs in private schools as well. In these schools, politicians' interference is far more limited than in public schools for three main reasons. First, private schools are only loosely connected to the Ministry of Education. This minimizes the effect of the politics involved in decisions within the Ministry. Second, private schools are owned by groups or individuals with clear religious and political affiliations. In most cases the school owners are either associated with a certain political or religious leader or are themselves one of those leaders in their communities. As a result, private school principals are shielded somewhat from the complexity of multiple and competing politicians' interferences in their work (as often is the case in the public sector). Third, because private schools compete for clientele by holding both their teachers and students accountable to a high standard of performance, decisions to please politicians are limited to situations which do not affect the well-being of the school in terms of its academic performance. This criterion is rarely, if ever, taken into consideration in the case of public school. Despite these limitations, principals in private schools still have to put up with attempts by politicians to win favors for their followers, especially through influencing principals' decisions about hiring and evaluating teachers and promoting, placing and disciplining students. As one of the principals related, the school owner, himself a politician, asked the principal to violate the school policy by

promoting a failing student as a favor for the child's parents.

In sum, community and religious political leaders influence both public and private school principals. Such interference impacts major educational policies and decisions, and hinders their implementation. Politics constitute an added burden on the principal's ability to perform effectively by further reducing the principal's autonomy in decision making. Political and religious leaders push to have things done their way in the school, thus leaving little room for principals to use their professional judgment as educators. Moreover, the intensity of the interferences forces most principals to work hard to find ways to limit the politicians' effects on the school. In order to achieve that, principals have to shift their focus from educational and instructional matters to managing the demands of the politicians. Interestingly, the study showed that in both public and private schools the politicized nature of the work context affected the principals' views of what constitutes a satisfactory role performance. Principals from both public and private schools believed that to do a good job in their position means to be successful in blocking out the politicians' interferences and shielding the school from its potentially harmful consequences.

In addition to school organization, the school location, and the community's politics, principals identified many other factors directly affecting their daily work. These include: restrictions on the decision making power of the principal; limited resources and shortages in personnel and basic educational equipment; irrelevant educational policies; a chronic absence of educational planning; and difficulties in communicating with problem students and their parents.

Learning more about factors shaping and characterizing the work contexts of school principals is crucial to any attempt at improving the principalship in Lebanon. Change at the central office (ministry) level is essential if local schools and principals are to be provided with a more supportive and resourceful educational, organizational, and governance structure. Norms within Lebanon's educational bureaucracy and the local community, and the school location and type are important contextual variables creating unique demands on a principal's role and related activities and responsibilities. The interplay of religion and politics in the school system is an especially strong factor that needs to be considered and monitored, and perhaps redirected, to reduce its negative effects on schools and on the principal's work.

Discussion: Comparisons of the Principalship Across Cultural Contexts

Research on the principalship in Western and neighboring countries was revisited at the conclusion of this study to compare its findings about the Lebanese principalship to those reached by researchers from Western and neighboring countries. Despite the wide cultural differences, Lebanese principals appear to share similar general role demands and expectations with their counterparts in the United States, Canada, Kuwait, Jordan, Israel, and Saudi Arabia.

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Differences in the general view of the role were less evident. Institutional demands appear to have more impact on the role at the general level. Cultural and social contextual demands appear, as would be expected, to have more impact on the details of how the principals do their work and how they react to these demands. Additional in-depth studies are needed in this respect.

Comparisons with the Principalship in the United States and Canada

Several repeatedly documented characteristics of the principalship in the United States are found to be relevant to the image of the Lebanese principalship revealed in this study. Existing similarities in the role are due partly to the general institutional characteristics of the role. In general, the role of North American and Lebanese principals covers the same dimensions: instructional, managerial, and political (Cuban, 1986, 1988), and a moral and interpersonal dimension (Greenfield, 1986, 1988b, 1995). In addition, similar to Wolcott's (1973) description, the work of Lebanese principals appears to be mostly reactive, and their days are filled with routine managerial activities.

The work of both the Lebanese and the U.S. school principal is marked by considerable complexity, and a variety of demands. As Blumberg and Greenfield (1980, 1986) reported about American principals, Lebanese principals are faced with competing demands that they find hard to balance. Expectations Lebanese principals hold of themselves echo Hallinger's and Murphy's (1987) characterization of school principals in the United States as "heroic."

In both countries, principals' role demands are shaped through their relations with teachers, students, and parents. As the work of Goldhammer et al. (1971) and Foskett (1967) observed, and similar to what the present study found, the role of the principal is shaped by demands from teachers, central office, and parents. Similarities appear also in the work context of the U.S. and Lebanese principals. Dwyer's (1985) description of the nature of the American principal's work context parallels to a large degree that of the Lebanese principal. Both principals have to deal with: the uncertainty of the school environment; the fluctuation of resources; the unpredictability of enrollments; and the complexity of the political climates in their communities.

Organizational factors (Hallinger and Murphy ,1987) are observed to impact the work of both U.S. and Lebanese principals. Additionally, findings by Salley et al. (1979), as well as results in the present study, strongly suggest that the type of the school is associated with differences in the way the principals described their work. Moreover, both studies found that the gender of the principal had only a limited impact on the principals' perceptions of their role.

Finally, principals in Lebanon and in Canada appear to have similar perceptions of what makes their job difficult. A study by Leithwood and Montgomery (1984a) reported

obstacles faced by Canadian principals which are similar to the ones faced by the principals in this study. Namely, the inconsistencies in the level of knowledge and training among teachers, the complexity of the work and the ambiguity of role expectations, the rigidity of policies, the inadequacy of resources, a low level of interest among parents, and the pressure of interest groups.

Despite the observed similarities, the cultural and environmental conditions create differences in the role demands faced by North American and Lebanese school principals. Notable differences in the role of the principal are found between the United States and Lebanon. First, the instructional dimension of the principal's role is far less pronounced in the Lebanese compared to the U.S. context. Although Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) reported that the actual work of the principal is mainly one of maintenance, and that the principal is more a manager than an educational leader, the literature shows that U.S. principals are expected to influence curriculum and teaching methods, and to be involved in teachers' evaluation. In contrast, Lebanese principals do not appear to hold any expectations to be instructional leaders. Rather, they are preoccupied, especially in public schools, with seeing that the Ministry's directives are carried out smoothly. With few exceptions, Lebanese principals do not seek to help their teachers improve their instructional methods, or to get involved in improving the curriculum. Principals focus primarily on supervising teachers' attendance records, and on checking the teachers' preparation books to insure that the teachers have prepared to teach what has been prescribed. Moreover, and unlike the principals that Goldhammer et al. (1971) studied, Lebanese principals are not concerned about the difficulty of maintaining a balance between their managerial and instructional responsibilities.

The second major difference is the impact of religion and of politics on shaping the role and role context of the principal. In the United States, religion plays little if any role in decision-making among public school principals, and there is much less incidence of political maneuvering by community leaders to directly influence school affairs than is the case in Lebanon. This is not to say that such influence is absent. Rather, by comparison, it is quite limited; the exception rather than the rule.

Comparisons with the Principalship in Neighboring Countries.

Comparison of the results of this study with the available research literature on the principalship in several neighboring countries found many similarities between the principalship in those countries and in Lebanon. Based on the assumption within social systems theory that environmental and organizational factors shape the role demands of a certain position, this result was not surprising given the similarities in the cultural and social contexts of Lebanon and her neighbors in the region. Noteworthy is the fact that the similarities are more pronounced when Lebanese public rather than private school principals are compared with their counterparts in the selected neighboring countries.

The main similarity is in the nature of the organizational context within which the principals work. Public school principals from Jordan, Kuwait, Israel, and Saudi Arabia seem to work under organizational constraints similar to their Lebanese counterparts (Al-Gasim, 1991; Al-Hadhod, 1984; Al-Halteh, 1980; Al-Shahlawi, 1987; Al-Shakhis, 1984; Al-Tammar, 1983; Al-Thibeiti, 1987; Ba-ron, 1974). Studies report that Saudi, Kuwaiti, and Israeli principals describe their respective educational system as highly centralized. In these countries, the principals' role is mainly to implement policies and directives handed down from their supervisors in the ministry of education's central offices.

Studies also point at the limited scope of authority and of decision-making power of the principal in these countries. Most important decisions are made at the central office rather than by the principals (Al-Thibeiti, 1987; Ba-ron, 1974). Saudi principals have limited involvement in financial decisions (Al-Thibeiti, 1987; Al-Sahlawi, 1987). Saudi and Kuwaiti principals do not take part in decisions related to selecting the teachers in their schools (Al-Tammar, 1983; Al-Thibeiti, 1987). In Israel, Ba-ron (1974) reported that, like in Lebanon, the educational policies put a lot of emphasis on maintaining control of and uniformity among the schools while leaving principals little discretion to make decisions within their schools. He also pointed out the arbitrary non-educational standards for selecting principals, and the lack of training among the selected principals.

The nature of the relations between the principal and teachers appears to be another area of similarity between the Saudi and Lebanese principals. Al-Shakhis (1984) described the relationship of the principals with their teachers as authoritative. He also explained that, culturally, Saudi teachers have the tendency to be submissive to those occupying power-leadership positions. This finding parallels that of this study regarding how the Lebanese principals view their role and how they deal with their subordinates.

In addition, differences in the role demands between private and public school principals in Lebanon are similar to those found by Al-Halteh (1980). Jordanian private school principals, like their Lebanese counterparts, have a larger scope of authority in hiring teachers, and are more involved in decisions related to planning and setting school goals.

In conclusion, finding numerous similarities in the principal role across cultural boundaries invites the need of more comparative research. Although this study did not reveal many differences based on cultural differences, it is believed that more specific in-depth comparative studies will illuminate more subtle, and important, differences. Research that compares the role and role demands in different cultural settings can unravel many contextual factors that shape the role; ones that are transparent to studies within the same culture. Moreover, comparative research exploring the role of Lebanese and North American principals is especially important for Lebanese educators. Given that Lebanese educators lack a locally developed knowledge base, they rely heavily on research and theory produced in the U.S. Consequently, more cross-cultural research holds the promise of helping these educators examine critically the transported knowledge base, thus facilitating more informed

decisions regarding what practices are congruent with the culturally specific needs of the principalship in Lebanon.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is the first empirical and theoretically grounded study of the principalship in Lebanon. More such studies are needed in Lebanon and elsewhere. While there appear to be many similarities in the principal's role and behavior across contexts, there are some important differences. More comparative studies, both within and across contexts, promise to yield new and valuable knowledge about the work, and the work-world, of this key actor on the educational scene. Extending the knowledge base in this fashion will provide needed direction for revising and implementing professional preparation and training for school principals. Such knowledge also promises to offer policy makers a basis upon which to redesign the role of the school principal -- clarifying what is expected of principals -- and to assess more systematically actual performance in the role -- clarifying what principals actually do -- and tracking the effects of their performance for children, teachers, and parents.

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